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A QUIET LIFE.

POEMS BY.

E. D. R.



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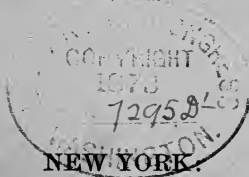
A QUIET LIFE

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

E. D. R. *rice*
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ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH AND CO.,

770 BROADWAY.

1873

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A QUIET LIFE.

You scorn my dwelling as you pass it by;
I do not say, Come in;
You are a stranger to the company
I entertain within.

My house is humble, yet within its walls
Contentment doth abide;
And from the wings of Peace a blessing falls,
Like dew at eventide.

You think my soul is narrow, like the room
Wherein I toil for bread,
And that, because oblivion is my doom,
I might as well be dead.

Yet are you sure the riches are not mine,
The poverty you own?
Is he not rich who finds his lot divine,
In hovel or on throne?

You judge me by the narrow boundaries
'Twixt which my body moves;
But I behold a wider land that lies
Free to the soul that loves.

Is that not mine in which I hourly take
My largess of delight?
Are not all things created for his sake
Who reads their meaning right?

Is it not mine, this landscape I behold?—
Mine to enjoy and use
For all life's noblest uses, though no gold
Has made it mine to lose?

I know the wood-paths where the feet of
spring,
Have left their prints in flowers;

And all the carols that the wild birds sing
Through the long summer hours.

I watch the changeful light upon the grass,
The wind-waves in the grain;
I note the swift cloud-shadows as they pass
Above the breezy plain.

Mine are the stillness of the autumn noons,
The peace of tranquil eves,
The sunset splendors, and the glimmering
moons,
The rain-fall on the leaves.

I cannot count the half of daily joys
Which kindly Nature gives;
For while some homely task my hands
employs,
With her my spirit lives.

Nor these alone the pleasures that I know,
The riches I possess;

Still other things are mine, and they bestow
A deeper happiness.

For unto me the past, with all its store
Of untold wealth, belongs;
To me the singers and the saints of yore
Repeat their prayers and songs.

For me again the long past centuries yield
The harvest of their thought;
My gleaning brings me sheaves from many
a field
Where stronger hearts have wrought.

Mine is the present, too; nor let it be
Despised as little worth:
I could not tell of all the good I see
Each day upon the earth.

What matters that my hands may never touch
The hands I venerate?

I thank my God that he has given such
To guide and guard the state.

And for the future—but I may not speak
Of all I hope for then!
The glories of that city which I seek
No tongue can tell, or pen.

So the day rounds to fulness, and the night
Is blessed, like the day;
For God, who makes the darkness and the
light,
Keeps every fear away.

COMPREHENSION.

It is not much that heart to heart
Can tell in words of human speech;
Its deep recesses lie apart,
Where only thought to thought can reach,

That is not friendship which can ask
And tell the best it seeks and gives;
That is not love which can unmask
Itself to anything that lives.

The deeper motions of the soul
Are never heard by human ear;
That which we cannot speak is all
That we most truly hope and fear.

Dear friend, with whom my life has run
A happier round, from day to day,

How little has our speech begun
The depths of feeling to betray!

How poor our words, how rich our souls!
How confident of mutual gain!
How tenderly our love controls
Each circumstance of change and pain!

And if in silence and in trust
Our love has grown from bud to flower,—
Its rootlets in this earthly dust,
Its fruit for an immortal hour;—

If soul to soul, in human speech
Can never make its fulness known,—
Will God be wroth we cannot reach
With words to His eternal throne?

Will He be dull to comprehend
The meaning of the heart He made?
Or slower than a mortal friend
To answer with His present aid?

He knows I trust for unknown good
The unseen love I clearly feel;
And, all my longings understood,
His time their answer shall reveal.

Content I lisp imperfect prayers
That hint at wants He fully reads;
And my unspoken praise He hears;
He takes my thanks, He helps my needs.

A HOLIDAY.

ONE day we left our cares behind
And trimmed our sails at early morn,
And by the willing western wind
Far o'er the deep were borne.

We left behind the city's din;
We found a world new-made from night;
At every sense there entered in
Some subtle, fresh delight.

The soft wind rocked us as we lay
Within the boat, and idly scanned
The dim horizon far away,
For some fair unknown land.

And on and on we floated thus,
Not caring whither we might roam;
For all the world, that day, to us
Was Paradise, was home.

And, as we sailed, a sweet surprise
Of comfort in the present grew ;—
We saw old things with clearer eyes,
We dreaded less the new.

The strangeness vanished out of life;
Affliction dropped her stern disguise;
And doubt, and weariness, and strife
Were changed before our eyes.

The past and future seemed to blend;
Remembrance lost her shadow, grief;
Anticipation was a friend,
And hope became belief.

So, but more clear, from hills of God,
One life on earth one day shall show,
And the dim path that here we trod
With heavenly light shall glow.

Too quickly sped the hours away;
The evening brought us home again;

And after that brief holiday
Came toil and care and pain.

Yet like a peaceful dream, that long
Will steal into the waking thought,
Or like a well-remembered song
That happy tears has brought,—

That bright, brief summer holiday,
The willing wind, the sea, the sky,
Gave gifts no winter takes away
And hopes that cannot die.

MY FRIEND.

I do not ask you whence you came,
Or wherefore you have grown so dear;
I know, since you deserve the name
Of friend,—God sent you here.

What need the present to o'ercast
With curious questions, why and how?
You came to me; the past is past;
Love's only time is now.

It matters not to streams that glide
From separate sources into one,
If by sweet vale or rough hill-side
Their earlier course was run.

Enough, that, mingling each with each,
Henceforth they flow together on,
Till the enfolding sea they reach
At last, their journey done.

If only like with like, this life
So stern, so sad, permits to blend,
Let us not vex our souls with strife
About the cause, my friend.

As sometimes, in a gloomy day,
The low sun glimmers through the cloud.
And sudden smiles with one sweet ray
Ere night the world enshroud.

So let us take the good that comes
Not quite too late for human hearts:
The sunshine of our earthly homes
Till this strange day departs.

A SOLDIER'S WIFE.

I READ the legends dear to fame,
Of old, heroic deeds and words;
I pause on many a noble name
That history records;—

Souls all sufficient for their fate,
Matched with occasion, strong and true.
O shining souls ! I call you great!--
I cannot be like you.

I am not like the wives of old,
Who armed their husbands for the fray,
And suffering agonies untold,
Smiled manly grief away.

Nor like the women who, to day,
Give up their all with willing hand,
Seeming to chide the long delay
To save their native land.

There stirs in me no martyr blood,—
I am not strong, I am not wise;—
I gave my best, but weeping would
Defile my sacrifice.

But, O great souls! than whom the past
Hold none more noble, none more true,
I praise you, while my tears fall fast—
I cannot be like you.

Yet if 'tis aught to feel and prize
The deeds I cannot emulate;—
And if, though neither strong nor wise,
'Tis aught to love and wait;—

If the weak heart can cheer the strong,
If helplessness itself endear,—

If perfect trust that fears no wrong
Makes brave hearts persevere;—

Then I may do my little part,
Not unaccepted nor untrue;
And still with you be one in heart
Though I am not like you.

AT EVENING.

WE sit at the window, my baby and I,
In the fading sunset light,
Watching the darkness creep over the sky
Out of the eastern night—
We see the stars come trembling out
In the track of the fallen sun,
And we feel the quiet, within and without,
Which comes when the day is done.

What have we been doing all day, all day,
Since the rosy morning smiled?
Playing at work, and working at play;
God help us, mother and child!

But much I fear that those little hands
Have put me to shame to-day,
For God, who is earnest, understands
Truly, our work and play.

I think of kindnesses left undone
Which might have brightened the day;
Of duties dreamed of, but never begun,
Scattered along my way,
You lie with peace in your violet eyes;
You have not learned regret;
For the sorrowful years that make us wise
Have not come to my baby yet.

And still, as I sit at this twilight hour,
After a weary day,
Even sorrow and sin do not quite have power
To keep a blessing away.
A blessing that falls like the dew from heaven
On the parched and thirsty ground;
And in loving much, because much forgiven
My deeper peace is found.

Your life, my baby, is just begun,
And mine is growing old;
But we're children both in the eyes of One
Whose years are all untold,
He holds us both in His loving hand,
He pardons us all our sin,
And, by and by, to the same sweet land
He will gently let us in.

BY THE SEA.

SLOWLY, steadily, under the moon,
Swings the tide, in its old time way;
Never too late, and never too soon;—
And the evening and morning make the
day.

Slowly, steadily, over the sands,
And over the rocks, to fall and flow.
And this wave has touched a dead man's
hands,
And that one has seen a face we know.

They have borne the good ship on her way,
Or buried her deep, from love and light;

And yet, as they sink at our feet to-day,
Ah, who shall interpret their message
aright?

For their separate voices of grief and cheer
Are blended at last in one solemn tone;
And only this song of the waves I hear,
"Forever and ever His will is done!"

Slowly, steadily, to and fro,
Swings our life in its weary way;
Now at its ebb, and now at its flow,—
And the evening and morning make the
day.

Sorrow and happiness, peace and strife,
Fear and rejoicing, its moments know;—
How, from the discords of such a life
Can the clear music of heaven flow?—

Yet to the ear of God it swells,
And to the blessed round the throne,
Sweeter than chimes of Sabbath bells,—
“Forever and ever His will is done!”

THE LILY OF THE VALLEY.

I THANK my God, I feel that not alone
On mountain peaks His blessed sunshine
glows,
And dews drop sweetness;—even here, far
down
In meads, a lily grows.

I am His work, who made the evening star,
Wherefore I lift to Him my flow'rets
bright;—
They die to-morrow, but to-day they are
Beautiful in His sight.

I look upon the hills, and sometimes dream
How they rejoice in morning's earliest light,

And how, serene, and strong, and still, they
 seem
To guard us all the night.

'Tis said the heights are cold; it may be so;—
 That winds are keener there, and winters
 drear;—
I know not how it is; I only know
 My God has placed me here.

Here in this little nook of earth;—my own;—
 And sent a sunbeam,—mine,—to cheer
 my heart,
He bids me bloom, perhaps for Him alone:—
 Is there a better part?

I bloom,—stars shine;—we bloom and shine
 for Him;
We give our best, grand world and humble
 flower;

The light through ages never growing dim;—
The fragrance of an hour!

So then He smiles, and takes with equal
love,
Our various gifts, nor knows or great or
small;
But in His infiniteness sits above
And comprehends us all.

TWO MOODS.

"Mon humem ne dépend guère du temps. J'ai mon brouillard et mon beau temps au dedans de moi."

PASCAL.

I.

THE landward wind is whistling shrill,
The tall pines moaning on the hill;
The heavy sky is cold and gray,
And darkly dies the wintry day;
But in my heart are warmth and light
That know no winter and no night—
Blow landward wind, blow fresh and free;
My love is coming home to me.

II.

The summer odors fill the air,
The sky is calm, the earth is fair;
Bright at my feet the flashing sea,
And singing birds in every tree;

But in my heart are depths of gloom,
Where neither light nor song may come;
Oh! smile not thus, deceitful sea!
My love will come no more to me.

OUR SAINTS.

A HEARTFELT smile, a gentle tone,
A thoughtful word, a tender touch,
A passing act of kindness done;—
'Tis all, but it is much.

The motions of a heart set free
From all-absorbing, selfish care;
A sweet concern, that seems to me
Like an unspoken prayer;

A look that reads the inmost heart,
Yet not with scrutiny severe;
Not as of one who sits apart,
Nor knows our pain and fear:

But as of one who, feeling all
That we have felt, of sweet or sad,
Has right to burst our sorrows thrall,
And bid us still be glad.—

These are not things to win applause;
No earthly fame awaiteth such;
But surely by the heavenly laws
They are accounted much.

Much in a world whose fret and strain
Wear daily on each finer sense;
Much to the heart whose secret pain
Draws help it knows not whence;

Much to the faithless soul that heeds
No truth which reason cannot prove;
For better than a thousand creeds
Is the sweet work of love.

And they, who give without restraint
Such gifts, and ask them not again,
What is there in the name of saint
That they should not obtain?

I think the angels in their height
Might look to earth and envy them,
And bend from out the spheres of light
To touch their garments' hem.

And that to brighter realms unknown
Some joy, perchance, they may impart;
For He who sits upon the throne
Once bless'd the pure in heart.

A PICTURE.

You see her in the sunset's level rays,
 Standing amid the flowers she loves so
 well,
Leaning to catch, with earnest, tender gaze,
 The downcast beauty of each blushing
 bell.

Her widow's weeds show dark against the
 bloom
Of rose and lily, with a sadd'ning shade.
Her dearest earthly treasure is a tomb,
 Yet can she prize all things that God has
 made.

She is not young, you mark, nor very fair;
 Yet time hath not the power to do her
 harm;
For all about her breathes a grace so rare,
 You feel its influence like a subtle charm.

You know not how it is, but when you speak
Your voice drops lower to the true heart-
tone.

For there is something in that presence
meek

To which you give your best, and that
alone.

Calmness and peace are in her settled air;
And cordial reconciliation with the past;
Calm after storms; peace after long despair;
And God's assurance that this peace shall
[last.

Whatever be the sorrows she has known,
She does not bare them to the curious eye;
Only to suffering hearts their depth is shown
By her intenser power of sympathy.

She loved and lost; but has not lost her love.
Her faith in God, her strength for all
that's best;

And death, who did her hope and joy
remove,
Left her this peace you see;—is she not
blest?

Down through the vista of the shadowy years
She looks serene, nor dreads the coming
night;
For well she knows, (she learnt it once with
tears,)
The promise reads: “At eve it shall be
light.”

OCTOBER.

God's finger-touch is on the hills;
The leaves beneath it gleam and glow,
Till the strange splendor over fills
Their trembling life, and lays them low.

So ardent souls, by fire divine
Enkindled, light our gloomy day;
A little while before us shine,
Then, spent with glory, pass away.

RESURRECTION.

WHEN last October's skies were blue
I stood and marked, with sighing breath,
The trembling autumn leaves, that grew
More glorious at the gates of death.

And when November's sullen wind
Swept all their beauty with its scorn,
I marvelled much what hope could find
To feed upon, that bitter morn.

No answer to my grieving came;
The winter snows all silent fell;—
They hid the glory and the shame,
And kept earth's mighty secret well.

Still busy with my murmuring,
I sought a path, the other day;
Where falls the earliest smile of spring
And lo! the snows had passed away.

I brushed aside the covering brown,
I found a blossom fresh and fair;
And then I knew it had not grown
But for the leaves that hid it there.

I took the lesson as my part;—
I said, I will no more complain,
Nor ponder with an aching heart,
The long, long catalogue of pain.

Nor mourn the law of loss and change,
Nor grieve that beauty vanisheth;
But rather from my narrow range
Seek to forecast the gains of death.

FEBRUARY, 1862.

I HEAR the signals of the spring
Through the long-lingering winter hours;
The flutter of the robin's wing,
The far, faint footsteps of the flowers.

What though no blade of grass is green,
And deepest snows the earth enfold;—
I know the snowdrop, all unseen,
Is pushing upward through the mould;

That in the hoary, silent trees
There wakes a pulse of freshening life,
To strengthen till the balmy breeze
Shall toss their leaves in playful strife;—

That ice-bound streams once more shall
glide,
Eager to meet the waiting sea,

And mirrored in their silver tide
The summer stars again shall be.

Still falls the snow; but nature's heart
Beats wildly, struggling to be free,
Nor shall stern winter's utmost art
Avail to thwart her destiny.

A nation waits, O earth! like thee,
With beating heart and anxious gaze,
Till war's wild winter cease to be,
And peace shall bring her summer days.

Nor earth nor nation waits in vain;
The months their gracious changes bring;
And through the snows and wintry rain
I hear the signals of the spring.

EASTER.

When to the rock-hewn tomb they brought
The lifeless Lord, with bitter tears,
And lingered, lost in sorrowing thought,
And saw no end to doubts and fears;—

When wondering at the works divine,
And wondering at the shameful death,
And at the last attesting sign—
Earth shaken by a dying breath;—

'Mid all these questionings and fears
Did some sweet spirit whisper trust
That He who dried the widow's tears
Would raise His own cold form from dust?

Ah, blessed grave! which friendship there
Yielded to hold the sacred clay
That mutely claimed such pious care!—
The Crucified is here to-day.

He comes not asking for a tomb;—
A sweeter boon may love supply;
The Lord is risen! He seeks a home,
A human soul to occupy.

Far holier than the hallowed place
Where once in death the Saviour lay,
Is every heart made pure by grace
To entertain the Lord to-day.

What need to seek Him midst the dead?
Behold! within the sacred walls
With us He sits, and breaks the bread;
On us His benediction falls;—

“Peace!” Let Thy peace, O Friend divine!
Abide with us, by day, by night,
Till the eternal morning shine
From Thee, the Resurrection Light.

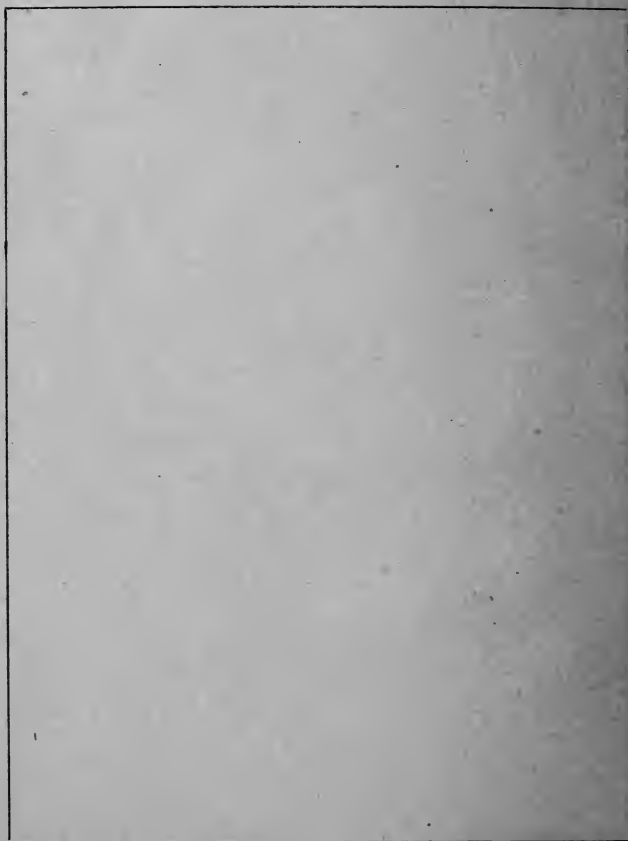
EVENSONG.

UNDER Thy loving care
Another day has past;
Its sacrifice of praise I bear
To Thee at last.

Thou knowest every cross,
Each pleasure and each pain;
Thou seest truly what is loss
And what is gain.

These tangled threads of life
Thou holdest in Thine hand,
And Thou alone their seeming strife
Dost understand.

So in Thy loving care
I rest secure, forgiven;—
Thou wilt the morrow's work prepare
Or give me Heaven.





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